

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANA 1806

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, PGOV, PINT
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI ON YEMEN'S POLITICAL FUTURE

BEGIN SUMMARY. PRESIDENT ALHAMDI TOLD ME ON MAY 9 THAT
FOLLOWING JUNESESSION OF "POPULAR CONFERENCE/ HE EXPECTS ELEC-
TIONS WILL BEHELD OVER THE NEXT YEAR FOR NEW CONSULTATIVE
ASSEMBLY. AL-HAMDI ALSO EXPRESSED IS HOPE OF BEING ABLE
TO RETURN FROM HIS DUTIES AS PRESIDENT AT THAT TIME.
ALTHOUGH SURPRISING THINGS HAVE HAPPENED IN YEMEN'S
POLITICAL LIFE IN PAST, IT DOUBTFUL THAT AL-HAMDI WILL
BE ABLE OR EVEN WANT TO CEDE HIS POWER AT THAT TIME.
END SUMMARY.

1. DURINGMEETING WITH PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI ON MAY 9, DIS-
CUSSION FOCUSED ON YEMEN'S POLITICAL FUTURE. AL-HAMDI SAID
THAT HIS IPE IS FOR ELECTIONS SOME TIME OVER THE NEXT YEAR
AFTER THE HOLDING OF THE POPULAR CONFERENCE (MATAMIR/SHA'BI),
WHICH WILL NOW TAKE PLACE IN JUNE.

2. AL-HAMDI CONTINUED THAT MANY PEOPLE WILL BE SURPRISED
WHEN THEY SEE THAT THESE ELECTIONS WILL LEAD NOT ONLY TO A
NEW CONSULATIVE ASSEMBLY (MAJLIS AL-SHURA) BUT ALSO TO A
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NEW CABINET AND EVEN A NEW PRESIDENT.

3. WEHN I ASKED HIM WHAT HIS PERSONAL INENTIONS WERE,
HE SAID HE WANTS TO TURN OVER THE GOVERNMENT TO A DULY
ELECTED LEADERSHIP IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND THEN RETURN TO
PRIVATE LIFE. HE NOTED HE HAS ALWAYS WANTED TO STUDY AS
WELL AS TO VISIT MANY COUNTRIES LIKE THE UNITED STATES.

4. AL-HAMDI OBSERVED THAT YEMEN LIKE MOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IS A DIFFICULT STATE TO RULE BECAUSE OF BOTH THE LACK OF EDUCATED GOVERNMENTAL PERSONNEL AS WELL AS AN EXPERIENCED CITIZENRY. AL-HAMDI SAID THAT IN YEMEN EVERYONE WANTS TO DRIVE WHEN EVERYONE KNOWS THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE DRIVER AT A TIME IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT. HE REPEATED THAT HIS ABIDING HOPE HAS BEEN TO BUILD A STRONG AND MODERATE YEMEN WHICH WILL ENABLE ALL OF ITS CITIZENS TO PURSUE THEIR PRIVATE INTERESTS IN FREEDOM AND SECURITY. AL-HAMDI STATED THAT UNFORTUNATELY MANY OF THE TRIBAL LEADERS ARE STILL NOT ABLE TO SEE THAT IN THE LONG RUN YEMEN'S BEST POLICY IS TO BUILD A VIABLE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN WHICH ALL WILL HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY.

5. ALHAMDI CONCLUDED THAT GOD WILLING WHEN HE IS FINISHED WITH HIS TASK TRIBAL LEADERS LIKE AL-AHAAR WILL SEE THAT HE WAS TRULY THEIR FRIEND EVEN IF HE WAS NOT A FRIEND OF THEIR STYLE OF GOVERNMENT.

6. COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST TIME ALHAMDI HAS DESCRIBED IN SUCH DETAIL TO ME WHAT HE INTENDS FOR THE FUTURE OF YEMEN'S INTERNAL POLITICAL SYSTEM. HE SPOKE IN A CONVINCING MANNER AND I MUST SAY IT WAS DIFFICULT NOT TO WANT TO BELIEVE HIM. AT THE SAME TIME, POWER HAS RARELY BEEN VOLUNTARILY CEDED IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD AND ONE WONDERS IF AL-HAMDI WILL BE THE EXCEPTION, DESPITE HIS PERHAPS GENUINE DESIRE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE DAILY DRUDGERY OF RULING SUCH A POLITICALLY DEMANDING AND CONFIDENTIAL

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FRUSTRATING COUNTRY LIKE YEMEN. THE PROBLEM IS THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY SOMEONE ELSE WHO COULD TAKE AL-HAMDI'S PLACE AND BRING TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE HIS UNIQUE QUALIFICATIONS I.E. ZAYDI AND SHAFI FAMILY BACKGROUND, CONSERVATIVE AND MODERATE POLITICAL CONTACTS, PLUS WIDESPREAD MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SUPPORT. IN ANY EVENT THE YEMENIS HAVE SURPRISED OUTSIDERS IN THE PAST AND THIS MAY HAPPEN AGAIN IN THE FUTURE. WE WILL JUST HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE. AT THE SAME TIME WHENEVER POSSIBLE IN A DISCREET LOW-KEY WAY WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE AL-HAMDI AND HIS GOVERNMENT TO MAINTAIN THEIR EFFORTS TO BROADEN THE PARTICIPATION OF MORE YEMENIS IN THE GOVERNING OF YEMEN AS THE BEST WAY TO ASSURE THAT THE PRESENT MODERATE AND PRAGMATIC POLITICAL CONSENSUS WILL SURVIVE.
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